



ועידת התביעות
Claims Conference
Conference on Jewish Material Claims
Against Germany

Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

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Preface



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"One man may paint a picture from a careful drawing made on the spot, and another may paint the same theme scene from memory, from a brief but strong impression; and the last may succeed better in giving the character, the physiognomy of the place, though all the details may be inexact."

Jonathan Raban,

"Notes from the Road."

"Writing is the process by which you explain to yourself what happened to you."

Arlene Croce



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Zamość, My Home Town.

Judith or Judy were not always my name. In reverse chronological order, I was called Irene, Irina, Irena or Orka.

My name and its pronunciation changed with each location where I lived up to my arrival in the United States ^{in 1951} at the age of 15.

I abandoned the "Irene" version and chose my Hebrew name from the equivalent of "Judith".

According to my birth certificate, which I obtained in 1983 upon my visit to Poland, I was born in Zamość and named "Orka," but called "Orka," a diminutive of "Irena."

Zamość is an architecturally distinguished city located in South-eastern Poland. It was founded around 1600 by an emancipated Polish statesman and scholar, Count Jan Zamoyski, and designed by an Italian architect.

Zamość was built on a grid, a fortified town based on a plan of reason and regularity, resulting in an ordered community. In the 20th century, Zamość consists of the old town, considered the prestigious area, and the new town, a less desirable section. Pre world war II

it had a population of 34,000, half of which was Jewish. It was home to Rosa Luxemburg, known Communist leader, and I. L. Peretz, famous Yiddish author.

Lamocic was also home to both my parents. They were born in the early 1900's and met in the mid 1920's. My father, Moshe, was then a handsome young man of medium built, with curly brownish hair and expressive blue eyes. He was sensitive, intelligent and well educated in Talmudic studies. By profession, he was a book-keeper employed by a wealthy Polish

flour-mill owner named Badzian.

My father was also a volunteer book-keeper for a charitable Jewish organization chaired by my maternal grandfather Eli who recognized my father's merits and arranged a match between the charming bookkeeper and his own daughter Rynka, my mother.

She was 20 years old, strong willed and stubborn. Her hair was brown, stylishly cropped, her body slender, and her hazel eyes sparkled. Rynka was considered beautiful and sophisticated,

educated at a secular gymnasium
(secondary school).

My father arrived at the prearranged
rendevous in the park wearing peasant
boots and an outlandish hat. Mother
was appalled; if it were not for her
parents' perseverance, she would not
have pursued this relationship with my
father. He, on the other hand, intentionally
wore this "costume" to test my mother's
character. Were appearances more important
to her than character?

They were married on a Friday in February

of 1927. Many Jewish weddings took place on that day of the week, ending before the onset of the Sabbath thus shortening the celebration and lessening the expense.

My parents had a good marriage. They lived in a comfortable apartment in the old section of Łańcuch, near their families.

My sister Tosia was born in 1928, and I followed eight years later. We were surrounded by loving relatives and close friends.

I was cared for by a Polish nanny, Marianna Szczur, who accompanied us each summer to Zakopane, a fashionable resort in the

Carpathian mountains.

In 1937, after managing one of Badzian's flour mills on consignment, my father built his own mill in Tomaszów Dubelski. It was named "Stawa" (fame). He became his own landlord and entrepreneur. We moved to Tomaszów, only 20 kilometers away from Łamósć, into a large house.

For the following two years, life was normal and uncomplicated.

The events of September 1, 1939, an infamous day in Poland's and my personal history, changed everything. At lunchtime on that

particular day, my mother tried to bribe my sisters with two zlotys (Polish currency) to eat a "kotlet," a hamburger. The negotiations were interrupted by a loud explosion. We ran into the garden; the skies were illuminated by fiery colors, and the air was filled with sulfa-like fumes. The first German bombs fell on Poland and World War II began.

Panic set in; everyone scrambled toward the ditches in the yard, which were dug in anticipation of war during the previous few weeks.

In the evening, when the all clear sirens rang, we returned to our houses, where the windows

were covered with light-proof window shades. During the next few days we attempted to make contact with our extended families; consult, discuss, make plans. But confusion reigned and rumors, rather than facts, prevailed.

The Non-Aggression Pact between Hitler and Stalin, signed on August 23, 1939, provided ^{for} the division of Poland between Germany and The Soviet Union. Łańcósć was presently

under German rule, and Tomaszów
under Russian authority. Thus ~~the~~ our
families were separated, and unable to reunite.
My parents joined a multitude of
other refugees on a track east. They
stopped in Chodorow, in the Ukraine,
known for its wooden synagogues.
It was here that my father's two younger
sisters and their families lived.
They provided temporary living accommo-
dations during this time chaos and
havoc.

Unbeknownst to me at the time,

my short childhood of three and a half years, came to an abrupt end. The Jews' and other victims' death certificates were issued. Carnage and murder became daily occurrences as Nazi hell and Stalinist terror descended upon the earth. My family became homeless and helpless, persecuted and hounded. Our odyssey did not terminate with war's official ending. My normal life did not resume until 1962 when I settled on Long Island as a married woman. I was 26 years old by then.

I Am Proud.

The ground was damp and cold. I could barely breathe as I lay face-down in the narrow ditch by the side of a rural road. My sister's knees pushed against me; and my mother's trembling body pressed down upon me. She was shielding her children from the bombing planes flying above.

We were fleeing from the Germans and traveling by horse-drawn wagon along a crowded, refugee filled road, when the bombing attack began. By the time it was over, the whole area looked like a battle ground. Instead of soldiers in uniform, we could only see dead civilians in ordinary clothing.

We reached Chodorow in the Ukraine in late autumn of 1939.

One night, about a week after our arrival, there was a knock on our door and three Russian soldiers entered the simple wooden house. They instructed my parents to pack within the next half hour and take only as much baggage as they could carry. We were going to a distant, unidentified place.

While hurriedly selecting and packing the items to be brought along, an uninvited Ukrainian neighbor came in to observe the frantic activity. His gaze roamed and then settled on my mother's mandolin. "I might as well take this mandolin" he said "because it looks

like you will not need it where you are going." My mother picked up the instrument, smashed it against the wall, and retorted "If I want need it, neither will you."

After many weeks of travel by wagon, boat and train, we were placed in commune barracks in a Siberian town to await transportation for the next stretch of our odyssey.

By now, my father was very ill with bleeding ulcers. The hospital was overcrowded and admission to it impossible. On frequent occasions, my mother would disappear for hours, while my father lay listless on a cot, and my twelve-year-old sister took charge of me.

One day, my mother returned from these secretive expeditions in a jubilant mood. She had approached a high-ranking official's wife, and given her a priceless, cherished dress. Thus my mother gained access to the woman's important husband.

To win his compassion, my mother told him that since in Russia precious metals are rare and clear glass, rather than silver-backed mirrors, is common, people don't look at themselves. They look at others and see the suffering of their fellow men.

The official was impressed by my mother's argument. His sense of empathy emerged and with it an admission slip.

to the hospital.

In the spring of 1945, shortly after the war was over in Eastern Europe, we were traveling again. It was Passover. The train was heading toward Szczecin, a Polish town on the escape route from Eastern to Western Europe.

All along the rail tracks there were German prisoners of war, engaged in forced labor. As the train moved slowly past the staring Germans, my mother kept throwing pieces of matzah at them. I could not understand why she would waste our limited food on these much despised people. When I questioned her, she firmly replied: "To let the Germans know that the Jews are still alive!"

My mother did not receive rewards or medals. But to her family she was a courageous heroine through whose efforts and resourcefulness we survived the war.

Whenever I think of the many acts of courage which she performed, a smile spreads across my face and a warm sensation surges through my body.

I am proud of you, mother.

A Relationship

Does a three and a half year old have memory? Perhaps not continuous memory, but memory of isolated events which engrave themselves upon its subconscious mind.

My first remembrance of Uncle Kisie is when he came to visit my parents, older sister Tosia, and little me, in the town of Chodorow in the Ukraine. He was one of my mother's six siblings, sent as an emissary by my grandparents to convince us to return to my hometown of Tarnobrzeg in Poland, where they all lived.

World War II had started in Poland on Sept. 1, 1939, with bombings by the

Germans. During the following few months, because of numerous pacts between Germany and The Soviet Union, the political control of the South-Eastern area in which I lived, kept changing hands.

My father decided to move us from German-held Janosć to Soviet-ruled Chodorow not many kilometers away, because general conditions there seemed to be better.

This separation upset the rest of the family immensely.

My uncle Kisie arrived unannounced. He was young, tall, slender and handsome. He had brown, curly hair and smiling blue eyes. His square

chin and broad forehead outlined a friendly and kind face.

Kisic brought me a present.

It was a two piece, pale blue, woolen knit outfit, most appropriate for the late fall weather. As everyone admired me in it, I admired myself in front of the mirror of the armoire.

My uncle lifted me by the elastic waist of the pants while I wrapped my arms around his neck.

Two days later, after persuading my parents to come back to Lamoć, Kisic left. Shortly thereafter we left too, but not for German-occupied Poland, as planned. When my father applied for a travel pass from the Soviet autho-

rities in Chodorow, they labeled him "disloyal" to Russia. We were exiled and sent as political prisoners to an outpost in a most remote region of Siberia, where we remained two years. Eventually we were re-located to Samarkand in the Uzbek Republic in Central Asia.

It was here I began an infrequent and one-sided correspondence with Uncle Kisi. Although discouraged by my parents to engage in such a hopeless endeavor, I continued to write postcards with short, childish messages.

One day, three years later and shortly after the war when we lived

in Stuttgart, Germany, my Uncle Kisil appeared at the door of our apartment. He was barely recognizable after seven years of absence.

He no longer looked like a young man. His posture was stooped and bent; his sparse hair was mostly grey; his once smiling, blue eyes were vacuous, tear-filled, and full of sadness.

On Kisil's right forearm was a ten-digit tattooed number preceded by the letter "A." The tattoo indicated that he had been a concentration camp inmate at Auschwitz. The thumb of that hand was missing, and its absence was self-inflicted. When it took place, Kisil was sent to the

camp's infirmary. While he was confined there, one of the last Nazi death selections took place. Almost all of the inmates of Kisil's regular barrack were sent to the gas chambers, while he escaped their fate.

After liberation at Auschwitz, Kisil wound his way back to Ławosze to search for his family. He found that all had perished in the Holocaust. His pre-war home was in shambles. The walls had crumbled; the rafters were hanging, and all furnishings were gone.

Before he departed from this scene of destruction, Kisil spotted, under the

rubble of scattered bricks, a piece of white paper. It was one of my postcards from Samarkand. That's how he learned that his sister and her family escaped Nazi extermination and were probably still alive.

After months of extensive personal inquiries and referrals by word of mouth of acquaintances and strangers, my uncle located us in Stuttgart.

Our reunion was joyous, yet sad, uplifting yet desperate.

Kisiel set out for Palestine, later known as Israel. Despite the British blockade and imprisonment at a detention

camp on Cyprus, he reached his destination in time to participate in Israel's war for independence.

At the end of 1951, my family immigrated to the United States.

During the ensuing years, I visited Uncle Kisi in Israel several times. Each time he lavished me with gifts he could barely afford. (He was offered monetary reparations from ^{the} West German Government, but refused to accept them.)

Many years later, my children still read from the now stained Passover Hagadah,

my husband wraps himself in the frayed talith (prayer shawl), I wear a fragile silver bracelet. And each day as I look at Kisie's photograph on the piano, my heart fills with emotion and my eyes with tears.

I loved Kisie for his devotion and dedication to me, and for being the only surviving composite of all the dead relatives.

He provided the experiences of which I was deprived in my childhood: a grandmother's embraces and kisses; a grandfather's expressions of pride and approval; an aunt's or uncle's attention and affection;

a cousin's companionship and confidences ...

Uncle Kisie died at the age of 55 of a broken heart and the lack of will to live.

At the time of his death, his wallet contained a folded, time-worn and badly torn piece of whitish paper. The writing on it was illegible, but the faded stamp was recognizable and the postal cancellation decipherable. It read "Samarkand."

One of my grandsons is named after Kisie.

Fears and Fights

Late August of a Siberian summer (1940). The rocky and and mossy embankments were identical on both sides of the wide river. They rose steeply toward the evergreen forests of spruce and pine trees, interrupted here and there by flat and flowering plains. The river served as the primary means of transportation for infrequently traversing boats, barges and rafts, providing access to scattered settlements along its banks.

In two months, by mid October, the waters will begin to freeze and navigation will cease. Once solid, the river will continue to provide passage for horse-drawn sleds and wagons. The plains will be transformed into white wasteland and endless, snow-covered taiga (subarctic forests) will dominate the forbidding landscape.

By early April, the thick ice covering the river, will begin to

crack and break. Transportation will come to a standstill until the waters will melt completely and the river will again become a flowing waterway, carrying boats, barges and rafts.

A lone raft rode rapidly down stream on the raging waters of the rough river. It was a primitive raft consisting of about a dozen logs tied together by interweaving, thick ropes.

A local Russian peasant was manning and guiding the raft. He was a robust, erect man ^{who} dexterously manouvered its course with experienced movements of his hands, gripping a long and sturdy pole.

I (aged four), squatted in the center of the wet raft, wedged between my mother and my sister. An overwhelming fear of both the hostile surroundings and the freezing spray of the river waters sent shivers through my body.

My attention was diverted by an object in the middle of the river just ahead of us. It grew progressively larger as we sped toward it. I recognized a

motor boat with a single passenger standing by the rail, staring at us in disbelief. As I studied the expression on his face, I was suddenly jolted into reality. The man was my father! We had been separated for three weeks when he remained in the hospital for a bleeding ulcer. We were in transit as exiles and political prisoners on route to a remote outpost in the hinterland of Siberia.

When we passed each other, the boat from the nether world, and the raft to nowhere, we were too stunned to utter a sound. Mental paralysis let the rare moment of contact evade us. Will I behold my beloved father again? Will he disappear forever?

Thankfully we reunited two days later in Syninga, our final destination. It was a small settlement, 1500 kilometers beyond Irkutsk, the last stop on the Trans-Siberian Railroad. This desolate, God-forsaken place became our open jail for the next year. There were no barbed wire fences nor armed guards. It was

a natural prison where escape was prevented by the confining, rugged terrain, and the restricting, harsh climate.

Winter. The wooden log barracks in which we lived were subdivided into small cubicles, each housing three or four persons. Adults were allotted a cot, and children shared one, sleeping head to foot. The narrow cots were placed away from the permanently frost-covered walls lest on contact the warm human body adhere to the cold ice, causing serious conditions.

A black, metal coal stove sat in the commune hallway. Its long pipe exited through the roof and its cooking surface held a greasy skillet. It heated oil in which black bread, our staple food, was dipped.

We obtained water by lowering buckets into excavated, deep holes in the ice of the river. The filled pails were suspended from the two ends of a pole placed across the shoulders and carried home.

Adult exiles were assigned to fell trees in the taiga, in sub-zero tempera-

tures. Most suffered from frostbite, and many died from shortage of food and medication.

My father, however, was assigned (through connections via the back door) to work as a bookkeeper in the heated office of the lumber production control center. He became a "Stachanovietz," top producing worker whose name was posted on the weekly honor-roll bulletin.

As a result, my father was dispatched monthly to other lumber labor camps to inspect their production records. He traveled by horse and sled, the horse leading the way through the ^{almost} continuous darkness of the winter days and nights. He didn't know the way and found the journey terrifying. Upon his return, he told us, in detail, about his encounters with wolves, reindeer and fox. During my father's prolonged absences I lived in a state of constant panic, envisioning him being attacked by wild animals. His safe return was a miracle that repeated itself over and over again.

Spring. Suddenly, one night, the familiar howling of wolves in the nocturnal silence was drowned out by a crashing and grinding noise from the direction of the river. We ran outside, bundled up in multiple layers of clothing and valenki (boots) on our feet. Illuminated by the full moon, starlit sky, and their reflection in the snow, I beheld a most awesome sight. Large floes of ice, abstractly shaped and glistening in the natural bright light, floated and collided with each other, creating a cacophony of thunder-like sounds.

On the crest of a floe stood two adolescent boys, screaming into the wind. I froze with fright, fearing for their lives. As I watched the boys, I noticed that they skillfully and expertly balanced their feet and bodies and began to skip from floe to floe. When they approached close to the bank, I recognized their screams as joyous laughter.

They will not drown, after all.

And summer, although Siberian summer was on its way.

Choices

The endless, frozen steppe stretched beyond the horizon. The only reminders of civilization were a solitary hut, a horse and sleigh next to it, and a group of three adults with two children.

The adults were my parents and a hired sleigh driver. The children were my older sister and myself.

We all wore multiple layers of clothing and fleece-lined boots, the men in hats with flaps covering their ears, my mother and sister in babushkas wrapped around their heads, and I in a woollen, blue coat with matching hat and scarf trimmed with fur pompons. It was my Polish winter outfit, skimpy and outgrown. It was tight, short and the buttons pulled.

The air was chilly on this late spring (1942) morning in Siberia. The temperature was about 0°F, but the wind was calm, and the skies were grey; dead silence dominated the solemn landscape.

As we stood there, tapping our feet and clapping our hands to keep from freezing, the quiet was interrupted by faint sounds

from a distant, invisible source. As they grew louder, I could see an airplane approaching, growing larger and larger in the sky. It landed a few feet away from us, slipping and sliding on the icy surface of the "landing strip."

The plane was very small and dilapidated, used for transport of freight and unimportant passengers such as my family.

My father, designated as "Stachanowietz" (honor-roll worker) bookkeeper in the local lumber production office in Syringa, was finally granted a transfer to a regional office in Bodaybo, a major town in Central Siberia. His objective was to relocate in a place closer to Western Europe and the Iranian border, so that escape from the Soviet Union would someday be feasible.

We reached the "airport" via a frozen river, but since the water-ways began to thaw, we could only travel to Bodaybo by air. Such luxury was a rare privilege.

We were the only lucky ones, or so I thought as I ascended the wooden ladder leaning against the plane's open door.

Once inside, I changed my mind. The pilot's stern face, the two metal benches, and the ripped rubber mats on the floor presented a grim scene aboard this barely heated monster.

Immediately upon take-off, I was motion sick and began wretching violently. The vomit froze as soon as it made contact with the cold air.

After a half hour's flight, we landed on a field almost identical to the one from which we took off. The purpose of the stop-over was to warm up in the stove-heated cabin, then continue our journey to Bodaybo.

Upon arrival, we were housed in a two room logcabin. One room was occupied by a Russian peasant woman and her teenage son, the other by the four of us.

We all shared a hearth with a stove for heat and cooking, tin pitchers for water, a wooden tub for washing, a couple of kerosene lamps for lighting, and a barrel of pickled cabbage.

Food was scarce that summer of 1942, and by autumn there was a famine in

Bodaybo and surrounding areas.

Each evening, during the harvest, my mother, sister and I went to the potato fields to scavenge for left-over or discarded spuds. From these my mother prepared delicacies. Nothing was wasted; peels, considered food suitable for animals only, were transformed into delicious pancakes. My mother discovered an edible variety of poison ivy which she picked with rag-wrapped hands. She boiled it and served it (with blistered fingers) as soup.

We shared these foods with our co-residents, while they shared their barrel of pickled cabbage (sauerkraut) with us.

I was sickly and skinny at six, and looked younger. My parents registered me in the children's communal kitchen as an eligible five year old, entitled to receive free cooked meals.

One morning, as my mother was walking with me for my daily food allotment, a local woman crossed our path. My mother avoided looking at her, but I stared intently. She was a stranger,

yet something about her was familiar.

Suddenly, I realized that the woman wore my mother's rose-colored dress, with many self-covered buttons reaching from the neckline to the hem. "Why did you give her your beautiful dress?" I cried.

"That dress is important. But we can't survive without the bread which it bought" my mother replied matter of factly.

I was present at the barter of a black, fashionable woolen coat which my mother purchased in pre-war Warsaw.

It was a Parisian model, with weights sewn into to the hem to give it shape and a permanently pressed look.

This valuable coat was traded for illegal transit papers. My parents were determined to escape a winter of starvation in Bodaybo, while the negotiator was eager to complete the transaction quickly. I was amazed at how fast the man departed, hugging the coat to his chest.

Later my parents explained that the "coat buyer" probably thought that he,

found an overseen treasure; he mistook the weights in the beam for hidden gold coins of a foreign currency.

We left Bodaybo in a hurry.

Weeks after, we arrived in Samarkand, in the Uzbek Republic.

Perhaps survival was possible after all.

Candle Sticks

A pair of silver candle sticks were miraculous objects to me at the age of six, sixteen and still are at sixty.

They are only a foot high, but seemed as tall as the majestic columns from the ancient Greek temples from which they were modeled. The capitals are carved, the columns smooth, and the pedestals on which they stand are reminiscent of bases for busts of heroes. The oval decorations on four sides seem to be awaiting inscriptions of names.

This family heirloom was given to my mother by my grandmother on her wedding day. Like her female

ancestors, my mother lit the candles in the candlesticks, during normal times each Friday night in Poland to usher in the Sabbath. When havoc broke loose and our lives were interrupted, so was the candle lighting ritual. The candle sticks, along with photographs, were the only cherished possessions from my ancestral home to accompany us through the exile years.

In Bodaybo, Siberia, they were my security blanket. Whenever alone, I crawled surreptitiously underneath the bed where they were hidden, wrapped in layers of rags and tucked in among other bundles. I followed

a ritual of unwrapping and rubbing them like Aladin's lamp, hoping for a magic genie to appear and grant me my wishes.

I repeatedly recited the same supplications: "Please don't let my father have another ulcer attack ... and stop those nasty boys from beating and tormenting my sister on her way from school. Her bleeding lips and bruised legs must hurt so... and mother, poor mother, don't let her be burned again by the steam in the bathhouse. The blisters on her arms and chest have not healed yet... and if I have any wishes left, please take away my cough from tuberculosis.

"I want to go to school..."

Suddenly, one afternoon, as I lay on my stomach underneath the bed, with the candle sticks in my hands and the wishes on my lips, I felt a jolt. There was pressure around my ankles as I was dragged to the center of the room. My captor was the teenaged co-occupant of our log house.

His facial expression was mean; strands of blond tangled hair semi-obstructed his pale eyes. His stained shirt was tucked in unevenly into oversized baggy pants held up by a tight rope belt. The bottoms of the trousers were rolled up, revealing clumsy, mud-covered shoes.

In a menacing voice he said:
"You'd better do what I tell you,
or you'll never see your precious
candle sticks again!"

I panicked and screamed.

"Don't bother yelling. There is no-
one here to hear you." he shouted.
As I sobbed, he pulled me into a
shed in the yard, and ordered me to
undress. As I fumbled with shaking
fingers with the buttons of my dress,
the boy threatened: "and if you ever
tell anyone about this, I will surely
kill you!" I knew that he was earnest.

My heart was pounding so loudly,
that I wasn't certain of hearing
his mother's authoritative voice

from outside: "Wace, where are you? Come here immediately!"

He obeyed without hesitation.

That evening my parents questioned me about my distraught condition. I did not divulge then nor ever the facts of that day's terrifying events. I vowed to better protect and not jeopardize the candle sticks again. When we emigrated to the U.S., they accompanied us to our new land.

Many years later, in 1983, I returned to Poland. The purpose of the visit was to verify my past, to separate truth from fantasy, to ground the facts of my origin.

Upon arrival in Lanose, the city

of my birth, I inquired at the city hall about an attorney to discuss my family's properties, a still existing house and an operating flour mill. I was directed to a Mr. Richter.

Richter, in his late fifties, was a "Folksdeutsche," one of many Germans settled by the Nazis in the early 1940's in Poland to balance the Polish population with German nationals.

He invited me to his home, was charming and hospitable. As he conducted a tour of his comfortable apartment, he pointed out his valuable acquisitions: a statue of General Piłsudski, a Polish national hero,

4.
a wall-hanging depicting a scene from local history, and a pair of silver candle sticks, almost identical to mother's!

I stopped breathing. Where were their original owners? Among the ashes of Majdanek's extermination camp, only a few kilometers away? or in the mass graves on the outskirts of Tarnobrzeg? Were they my 'dead relatives'? Did Richter face them?

Mother's candle sticks are now mine. I light the candles in them each Friday night to usher in the Sabbath. In their flames, I see my mother's face and hear her voice whispering: "Good Sabbath, my child."

A Birthday

The courtyard was surrounded by a crumbling stone wall. Two tall trees stretched their scrawny limbs towards the cloudless sky, and weeds grew everywhere. Three mud huts and an outhouse stood in each corner of the yard and a well in its middle.

One mud house housed an Uzbek couple, the other a Polish-Jewish expatriate, and the last was occupied by my family.

It was hot. My parents and our expatriate neighbor sat on a makeshift wooden bench in front of his hut. They were engaged in a serious, rushed conversation. As I listened,

I discerned isolated words: "died, illness, misfortune." Were they referring to our neighbor's young son whose death from typhoid I witnessed a month ago? or was it his wife's death two weeks later?

The conversation was interrupted by the chanting call from the minaret of a nearby mosque, summoning Muslims to the evening prayers. When it resumed puzzling words reached my ears: "Roosevelt, president, peace..."

It was mid April, 1945 in Samarkand, in the Uzbek Republic, a week before my ninth birthday. A time of celebratory anticipation became a time of deep mourning. Our "savior,"

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, president of the United States of America, half way across the world, died and with him our hope for peace.

On the morning of my birthday, April 20 (in common with Hitler), I was awakened by my sister's scream. There was a deadly scorpion on our shared pillow! While my father disposed of the venomous creature and my mother sprinkled water and swept the dusty mud floor of our one-room hut, I rehearsed a many-versed poem my sister wrote on my mother's request for me to recite on my birthday. I was nervous, dreading the task that lay ahead.

Fifty years later, I still remember the first two lines (in Polish) that ironically proclaimed: "Today is my birthday, the happiest day of the year."

I don't recall the birthday celebration, but I vividly recall my father taking me at its conclusion to the local photographer. There he presented me with a typical Arab headcovering worn by males. It was four cornered and hand embroidered in a bright floral pattern. I desired this cap forever, and wore it proudly as I posed for the photographs. At the same time, however, I was self conscious of my general appearance. I looked emaciated and skinny after a serious bout

with yellow jaundice. I missed attending second grade and was tutored by my mother in school subjects and instructed by my father in Hebrew.

Before we left the photographer, he led us to his garden behind the primitive shop, and picked purple, long-stemmed irises which he gave to me in honor of my birthday.

As my father and I walked home, I beamed with joy, with my new cap on my head, and the beautiful flowers in my hand. My happiness did not last long. The irises were snatched from my clenched fist by a passing boy, and I was left with tightly held stones.

That night, my mother stood by my bed with an orange, a fruit I never saw nor tasted before. Where and how she obtained it remains unknown to me.

She called it "a golden apple from Eden." And I believed her.

Berlin.

For the Holocaust survivors, liberation was the end of a nightmare and the beginning of a painful process of re-adjustment.

They came to West Berlin from the corners of Eastern Europe and from Soviet republics beyond the Ural mountains - Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.

They came from concentration camps and hiding places.

They had a look of both despair and hope on their gaunt faces, and sadness in their eyes.

They were dressed in worn clothing, crudely mended and patched, and carried meager belongings in bundles or frayed suitcases.

Men, women and children.

My parents, sister and I were among them. It was spring of 1946.

We were assigned a room, to be shared with four other persons, in a barracks of block number 46, at Camp Schlachtensee in the American Zone of Allied occupied Berlin.

This camp was sponsored by UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) and operated by the U.S. Army. It was a recently vacated Nazi military base on the outskirts of the totally bombed ^{out} city.

Upon receiving an official report about DP (displaced persons) camps such as Schlachtensee, President Truman stated: "We appear to be treating the Jews as the Nazis treated them, except we do not exterminate them."

DP Camp Schlachtensee was administered by Harold Fishbein, an UN official and an

American Army ex officer. He was compassionate and sensitive to the almost all Jewish internees' recent painful past and current needs. The camp became an autonomous, all encompassing community where we felt unthreatened and safe. It had a school, synagogue, medical clinic, sports center. A weekly newspaper was published in Yiddish, the common language; political parties were represented at meetings; and attempts were made to resume a semblance of normal life that fulfilled the emotional and social needs of the residents.

Official weddings, Births, overt holiday celebrations, burials, etc. took place for the first time in many years.

Accommodations at Schlachten-see were spartan. We slept on

U.S. army cots; we were fed food supplied by the army; clothed in either military surplus garb or second-hand clothing donated as "care packages" by American contributors. I recall a pair of "care," laced, brown shoes that I wore despite the fact that they were much too narrow for my growing feet. I still blame these shoes for my painful bunions that have plagued me ever since.

We accepted the far-from perfect conditions and were basically happy because we were no longer persecuted. We remained within the confines of this walled "ghetto," afraid and reluctant to venture into the outside world of demolished Berlin that lay in rubble and ruin.

Aside from daily tasks, most of the time was taken up by conversations and exchanges of information about the fate or whereabouts of relatives, friends,

acquaintances. The adults talked and the children listened.

In the beginning, the stories of concentration camp horror seemed fabricated to me, but as each successive narrative ensued, it confirmed the content and veracity of the preceding one; only the names and locations changed. Accounts of infants hurled against walls, pregnant women stabbed in the stomach, parents forced to choose which of their children will live and which will die were some of the recurring themes.

The eye-witness testimonials surfaced like etchings in black and white, became transformed

into bolder woodcuts that grew into colored illustrations and finally emerged as detailed paintings in brilliant fauve hues. As the mind absorbed the initially abstract pictures, it eventually reconstructed them into representational scenes. Each brain of the listener created its personal image of a dead loved one.

During these inquiry sessions we learned about the details of the fate of some of our numerous relatives. My father's youngest sister Pearl, her husband and their infant were in hiding with an Ukrainian farmer near Chodorow. A feud developed between this well compensated peasant and his brother-in-law. In retaliation, the latter denounced the farmer and his Jewish protégé's to the

Gestapo. The Ukrainian was punished, Pearl and her family were executed.

My mother's younger brother Chaim, in his 20's, lived on Aryan papers in Warsaw. He worked with the Polish underground and fell in love with a member of that group. Since she did not reciprocate his affection, my uncle volunteered for dangerous missions beyond the call of duty. Three days before the liberation of Warsaw, he was apprehended by the Gestapo on a public bus.

Uncle Chaim, meaning "life", died during an interrogation as a result of brutal torture for refusing to divulge information about his underground colleagues.

Despite the relative comfort of the DP camp, the inmates

had to face the fact that they were ~~transients~~ in search of tomorrow. Most would succeed in finding the promise of the future, some would succumb to the pull of the past.

A song, expressing the common sentiments of the refugees, was composed during the early days of post-war freedom. It became the hymn of the homeless everywhere.

The lyrics were in "mamelusken" Yiddish, the binding mother tongue: "Wuakin sol ich gayn, az dos ghetto iz farmacht?" (tell me where shall I go when the ghetto is now closed?)

After about two years in existence, DP camp Schlachterssee closed in 1948 due to the Russian

blockade of Berlin. American airplanes that brought in supplies, took out DP's

We landed arbitrarily in Stuttgart.

Berlin II

"Herzel School, Schlachtensee. Reunion 1991" read the banner outside a motel in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The lobby was filled with well dressed, middle aged guests. The men clean shaven and groomed, the women bejeweled and coiffured.

Once again they came from far corners, this time from the corners of the world: North and South America, Europe, the Middle East, blown there by the winds of post-war and fate.

The participants were engaged in animated, overlapping conversations punctuated by exclamations of laughter and weeping, surprise and recognition.

In the center of the group sat an elderly gentleman. When I approached and identified myself, he did the same. His name:

2

Harold Fishbein, age 93, former director of Camp Schlachtensee!

We reminisced, recalling long dormant memories of remote places and forgotten events, identifying faces in the almost fifty years old photographs that accompanied each of us.

One of my own pictures was inscribed on the back in a childish handwriting in pencil. It read in Polish: "To my friend Irka, forever Masza, Berlin, 1946."

The photo showed two young girls, one was myself, the other Masza. "But where is she presently?" I asked a woman standing next to me as she examined my album. She pointed at a woman nearby.

Masza materialized out of the past. Was the "forever" on the back of the photo "now?"

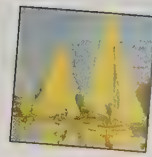
Masha lives in a beautiful

brownstone in Manhattan. She is a prominent business woman, operating a prestigious jewelry store in New York City.

Harold Fishbein died shortly after the reunion.

Camp Schlachtensee remains in existence to this day, serving as a prison facility.

And its inhabitants of half a century ago? They are free citizens of the world, and I am one of them.



Stuttgart

There was a housing shortage in 1947 in Stuttgart, home of Mercedes Benz, car manufacturer and Hitler's war-machine provider, and I.B.

Farkas, producers of Cyclon B gas used in Nazi extermination camps.

My parents, weary of DP camp living, searched for a private residence. From Berlin they moved into a rented room on Potten-Wald Strasse, ^{Stuttgart}. The apartment, consisting of four bedrooms, became home to nine persons. An elderly German couple, occupied one room, my parents and I a second and a middle aged couple with two young adult daughters a third and fourth. We all shared a kitchen and bathroom.

The common facilities were immaculate, but even though we lived there for two years, we had minimal contact with our co-residents. They ignored us as Jews, and we avoided them as Germans. The war experiences were too fresh and painful.

My sister was at that time in medical school in Marburg-am-Rahn. At 19, she would not have been eligible (no matter how impressive her credentials were) to enter the university.

Age was a ^{predominant} factor. German universities immediately after the war granted priority admission to persons whose education was interrupted by the war. Since official documents were not available to survivors, each chose a birthday arbitrarily by convenience. My sister chose to become ten years older officially than in actuality.

And I, still one year younger than in fact, enrolled at the "Chaim Nachman Bialik" School, sponsored by the Socknut, the Jewish Agency of Palestine.

I was in fifth grade with classmates whose age ranged from eleven (as myself) through sixteen.

Diminutive, conscientious, and an excellent student, I became a Teacher's choice as a representative to dignitaries who visited our school.

On one such occasion, Eleanor Roosevelt came to visit our school.

It was a day of excitement and anticipation, but also nervousness, especially on my part. I was to recite a welcoming message in English.

a word of which I did not understand; it was all by rote, in a foreign language. The speech was to be addressed to the First Lady of the U.S. and the Ambassador of Good Will.

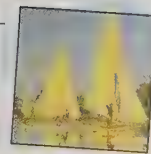
Equiped with a bouquet of flowers and a rehearsed speech, I awaited the moment of presentation.

It was to be preceeded by the playing and singing of The American National Anthem by the school's music teacher and student body.

But at the last moment, the musical notes were nowhere to be found! The faculty, students and myself froze in fear.

After almost half an hour of agony and panic, the ^{musical} notes were procured, and the program proceeded as planned. My personal connection with Eleanor Roosevelt left a lasting effect never to be broken or forgotten. This was my one and only encounter with this great humanitarian person.

However, some of ^{friends &} my classmates from the Chaim Nachman School reappeared in my life many years later.



Stuttgart II

Upon his arrival in New York City from Vineland, N.J. in 1968, my father became the controller at a major Manhattan hotel owned by his pre-war acquaintance.

One July day in 1971, ascending the hotel's elevator, he noticed on one of the floor stops two young women who looked familiar. The women, at the same time, saw a man whom they recognized as Mr. Heckkopf. Eventually, they connected in the lobby.

The women were my classmates and friends during the 1940's in Stuttgart. They were the sisters Hela and Esther Huberman who emigrated to Brazil and were in New York as tourists.

We established contact and have visited each other in our respective countries.

Hela is married to a physician. She met him shortly after her arrival in Sao Paulo in 1949. She was hospitalized for an appendectomy at which a young intern, her future bride-

groome was present. Although this operation was recommended while Hela still lived in Germany, it was not performed because her mother did not trust German doctors.

Esther became a young widow whose survivor husband was a wealthy self-made industrialist. A decade ago he was nabbed and murdered by one of his employees.

Another classmate and friend from the Stuttgart years, emerged unexpectedly. Her name was Chadasa Eisenberg.

After attending a lecture recently by a New York college professor on the subject of Brazil's Jewry, I inadvertently questioned him about the usage of Yiddish in that country. In reply, he made reference to a colleague during his Sabbatical teaching year at the University of Sao Paulo. Her name is Chadasa Eisenberg - Cytrynowicz. She teaches Yiddish language and literature.

Two of Chadasa's three sons are academicians and live in the U.S.

The Cytrynowicz family in Brazil

is quite affluent. Chadasa's husband and his brothers introduced the modern method of mechanized manufacture of textiles to that country.

They came to Brazil in the early 1950's, with a second-hand electric weaving machine, and revolutionized its technology.

Ingenuity, perseverance, resourcefulness, luck - were some of the ingredients that kept the "survivors" alive during the war; the same ingredients made them successful after the war.



Munich

I was lonely during the summer of 1951 in Munich. I had moved there from Stuttgart in 1949, and attended a school sponsored by Sochnut (The Jewish Agency in Israel) on Mehlstrasse.

All of my classmates and teachers were DP's (displaced persons) and survivors. Although the teachers were not accredited professionals, they were educated, knowledgeable and motivated. All subjects were taught in Hebrew, the required common language used by the multi-lingual student body. The textbooks were supplied by the Jewish Agency.

After school activities consisted of joining ORT (Organization for Rehabilitation through Training) where I learned how to sew and embroider. I also visited the ice skating rink in cold weather.

But mostly, my friends and I were involved in common teen pursuits: socializing, boy-girl romancing, gossiping, playing and dreaming. None of us discussed war-time experiences; they lay dormant in the back of our minds.

Subconsciously, we tried to recapture our lost Childhood and pretend that we too were normal youths.

One of my closest friends was Rut. She was Lithuanian and among the few whose both parents had survived the war. In school she stood out in science and at play she distinguished herself as a tomboy and mischief planner.

My bosomboddy was Yadsia. Like myself, she was Polish. She lived with her mother near me, and we spent most days and many nights together, sharing secrets and intimacies. She was feminine and sensitive. Yadsia excelled in artistic talents: she drew beautifully and played the violin.

And I, Orka, stood out in the liberal arts, especially languages and literature.

Rut, Yadsia and I were often a threesome, complimenting each other in personality and interests, myself being the catalyst of this trio. Our common language was laughter and fun. Rut's limited Polish, and Yadsia's and mine very limited Yiddish somehow enabled communication after all.

The Jewish community in Munich at that time was transient. By 1951, most of the DP's emigrated to the new state of Israel, U.S., Canada, Australia, South America and South Africa.

Rut left for Canada and Yadsia moved to Berlin after her mother remarried. I felt isolated and abandoned. My parents applied for emigration to the US and awaited sponsorship papers from my mother's uncle who was a pre-war resident in New York.

Our school did not reopen in September due to lack of students. A previous classmate, Shoshana, and I reluctantly enrolled in a German public school.

Our proficiency in the German language was limited and our cultural differences obvious. We were either ostracized or ridiculed, at best ignored. Shoshana and I clung to each other like drifters in the sea, as if we were drowning in the ocean of hostility. After five weeks of misery among the enemy, we quit this school with relief. We stayed at home and awaited emigration.

During that period Shmulevsky was

a frequent visitor to my home. He was a Jewish young man from San Francisco who was the assistant counsel at the American Embassy in Munich, and my sister's and her fiancé's friend. Both were medical students at the University where they met Shmulevsky at a costume party.

When we were accepted for emigration to the U.S. and our destination was Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Shmulevski described the city to us. I envisioned a German-influenced place where each window-sill was adorned with flowerboxes filled with geraniums, boys clad in Lederhosen and girls dressed in dirndls.

When we finally sailed from Bremen-haven in mid November, I was excited and impatient to reach Milwaukee. Our ship was the U.S. Naval vessel SS Greely. It was used to transport Army troops from the States to be stationed in Europe, and on the return journey to bring refugee immigrants to the American shores.

My sister, who married two months prior to our departure, remained with her husband in Munich, awaiting graduation from medical school at the end of the semester.

and then joining us in America.

Aboard ship, men and women had separate accommodations. My mother and I were directed to bunk beds in the hold of the boat, amongst about 100 other women. My father's situation was the same amongst men. For privacy, we had crude curtains between rows of double-decked sleeping platforms, reminiscent of war time labor camps and post war DP barracks. At meal times, we used canteens and metal dishes as we stood on line in the malodorous messhall to receive our rationed portion of food.

The 13 day-long ocean passage was difficult for me. The waters of the Atlantic were turbulent and the weather stormy; I was seasick most of the time, lying prone on a cot in the infirmary.

At last, on Dec. 4, 1951, we reached New York harbor. It was dusk.

I was elated as I encountered a breathtaking view. The illuminated statue of Liberty, the tall skyscrapers in the background and the light-studded bridges in the foreground looked like a fantasy world created from sparkling jewels. I stood on the deck

mesmerized, glad we had to remain on the ship overnight. Admission into port was not possible because customs and immigration offices were closed for the night.

The following morning I eagerly ran back to the deck. I was shocked. To my great dismay the scene of the previous evening seemed like a mirage. Grey bleakness enveloped dilapidated buildings facing the pier; cloudy skies hung heavily over garbage and debris - strewed paths and a damp and misty blanket covered everything.

My eyes filled with tears as I followed my parents down the gangway. After extended immigration processing, we were met by a JOINT Distribution Committee representative who informed us that our destination was changed from idyllic Milwaukee to earthy Chicago. Opportunities for physicians were better in large cities, and Joint did not want to separate families, namely my sister and brother-in-law.

My dreams were shattered twice within one hour. I was neither child nor adult, again just a stranger in an alien land, crushed and disappointed.

And as soap cleanses the body, so my
tears cleansed my soul on the
train heading for Chicago,



Munnich II

My American-born friends, when they travel overseas and back home, make an even number of trips, I - an odd. In 1959, eight years after my arrival in the U.S., and three years after becoming a naturalized American citizen, I returned to Germany. This even-numbered voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, heading eastward, differed from the first westward journey.

I sailed aboard the luxury liner SS Bremen on her return maiden voyage. My private cabin had a porthole; the ^{new} linens were made of damask, the towels of plush terry cloth. The dishes in the elegant dining room were fine china, and champagne filled the crystal glasses.

I came to Germany as a newly-wed wife of a Dental Corps officer and as a teacher at the American Dependents School. For two years we lived among Germans in the town of Pirmasens, and worked among Americans on the Army base.

My relationship with the local population was limited by choice, and based on past experiences. Tables had turned: I belonged with the victorious

they with the vanquished. I was not jubilant, just suspicious and mistrusting.

The highlight of this sojourn was my reunion with Yadsia. We spent time together before she immigrated to Israel where she met and wed an Israeli book publisher.

Our relationship had not changed; the years of separation only reinforced our mutual affection and bond. The one thing that did change was her name: Yadsia dropped her Polish name and assumed her Hebrew name "Tova."

We have maintained contact through the ensuing years via personal visits, correspondence and long distance telephone calls.

Tova is an established artist whose paintings are exhibited in galleries and museums in Israel, US and Europe. She is also known in Israel as a stage and costume designer for major theatres.

That is her public image. In private, she remains a warm and caring person, but like the rest of the survivors - permanently affected by war-time memories. To this day they remain unspoken, not revealed even to me, her closest friend.

But, now Ruth, on the other hand, shares the memories of her war-time experiences through published accounts and oral lectures.

At the age of seven, while an inmate in a Lithuanian ghetto, Ruth was responsible for her four-year old sister when her parents were away at a labor camp. In their absence, a "Kinderaktion" (death ^{children's} selection) took place at the ghetto. Ruth was chosen by a SS officer to live; her younger sister Tamara, was torn from her hand grip and placed on a death-bound truck, never to be seen again.

Ruth survived the rest of the war as a Christian child in hiding with an Arjan, Catholic - peasant family.

Although not a hidden child myself, I was drawn to attend the international "Hidden Child Conference" held in Manhattan in 1992.

1,200 persons participated in numerous workshops, lectures and events.

While observing a psycho-drama workshop, I was stunned: a familiar female figure approached the microphone. As she spoke, her voice evoked a dormant memory. After 40 years, I still recognized my

childhood friend Rüt from Munich.

I called out her name from across the room, she responded with "Orka?"

We hugged and kissed, and gave vent to our emotions, while the audience, too, became involved in our momentous reunion.

Ruth lives presently in Vancouver, Canada, with her dermatologist husband and three children; one of her grandchildren is named Tamara. She is director of Women's Resources at the University of British Columbia.

She is now a grown-up tomboy, full of joie de vivre and spunk. As adults, we share our past through endless discussions and reminiscences, our present through joint vacations and visits, and our future with hope and trust.

In June of 2001 a fiftieth reunion of students who attended the school on Mehlstrasse will take place in Munich. Tova, Ruth and I plan to participate in this milestone event. Many will join us from around the world; few reside

in Germany, and some refuse to set foot on German soil.

We, the child survivors of the Holocaust, mature adults today, have developed different attitudes as a result of our lives' experiences. We act and react according to the dictates of our psyche and interpretations of our mind.

Yet we were all branded by our childhood's catastrophe...

America

December is not my favorite month, particularly December of 1951. My parents and I arrived in Chicago at the beginning of the month, on a cold and rainy day.

We were met at the railroad station by a female representative of Joint and taken by bus to an apartment on the South Side of the city, a Jewish neighborhood. It was occupied by an elderly lady who made two rooms available to us, "the greene immigrants," in order to supplement her income. The rent was paid for three months by JOINT. The premises were dark and musty, poorly furnished and very depressing. The whole scene was a sad introduction to my initial life in the U.S.

On the following day, my father took me to the Ida Crown Hebrew Academy. It was an orthodox parochial school, offering secular studies in English and Jewish studies in Hebrew. I was enrolled in tenth grade and began attending this school in mid semester.

Once again, I was stranger in a

strange land, an outsider in an established student society, a non-observant pretender in a religious educational institution.

Knowing English only superficially, I was embarrassed to speak. When replying to questions, I chose "yes" or "no" arbitrarily, and probably mostly incorrectly. At a sixteenth birthday party, when asked how many cashmere sweaters I had, I responded, without understanding: "eight." It was much later that I was able to interpret the astounded expressions on the faces of the girls who heard my "boasting."

As a fifteen year old teenager, I wanted to acclimate and be part of "them." But I was different: my speech, my dress, my lack of make-up, my non-English speaking parents, and mostly my self-image.

I was conditioned during the war and post-war years in Europe to be ashamed of being Jewish. I knew the Christians only as enemies and persecutors. It took me many years from that December of 1951 and on to gain self-confidence as a person and pride as a Jew.

The passage led through undergraduate college in Chicago and Brooklyn from

1953 to 1956, a semester of study in Israel in 1956. While in Israel, the Suez conflict broke out. Both my parents in the U.S. and I in Israel, panicked. This war, only ten years after the previous one (W.W.II) ended, was too fresh in our memories.

I returned to "safe" America when I had a choice to remain in "dangerous" Israel. Guilt and regrets resulted from that decision.

In Israel, I felt a sense of belonging, identity, and self confidence. There I was at home, in the US I was still in exile.

At this point, I boarded with my mother's widowed aunt in Brooklyn, and supported myself through teaching at Hebrew schools. In addition, I studied in a Master's program at the Jewish Theological Seminary. I was now a practicing orthodox Jew: initial pretense led to genuine conviction.

Being of marriageable age, whom did I date? Definitely not survivors! After all, I considered myself unaffected by the Holocaust. I reasoned that I was too young at the time to be influenced by war-time events. I wanted a normal life with a mate who was American

born representing stability, a professional representing security, observant orthodox providing commonality. The man I married in 1959 met all of my requirements in addition to love.

My husband, a dentist, volunteered for the US army, and was stationed as an officer in Pirmasens, Germany. I accompanied him as a teacher at the American military school. We isolated ourselves from the German population, and socialized with fellow Americans.

In my mind, I questioned every German of proper age: "where were you during the war? how many Jews did you murder?"

After two years of service, we settled on Long Island in a predominately non-Jewish community. My husband opened a dental practice, I resumed graduate studies in library science, and we raised two children.

I searched for religious liberation, yet kept traditions and rituals. Our daughter and son attended Hebrew Day School outside of our residential area.

I began to feel like a fish out of water

as a traditional Jew in an assimilated community, and a primarily gentile world. At the age of fifty, I had still not found a comfortable niche for myself and my family.

I began to wander about my origins. In 1983 I traveled to Poland to examine my roots and to ground myself. Provided with an outline of residences and whereabouts supplied by my parents, I retraced my steps and visited places of extermination of my people. This odyssey became a milestone in my life. It made me aware of the fact that the years of war left an undeniable impact on my psyche.

After the pilgrimage to the land of my birth, I accepted the reality of the effects of the Holocaust upon me, and the need and right to identify myself as a survivor. (These emotions were expressed by me in a letter to the New York Times).

Ever since, I immersed myself in issues relating to the Shoah and exposed myself to information on the subject through books, lectures, films, docudramas, conferences, symposiums, etc.

In 1995, I retired after twenty five

of work
 years, as a teacher-librarian. It was then that I participated in the video-taping project by Stephen Spielberg. I am active as a speaker and docent in a Holocaust Museum, a donor of war-related materials to museums and institutions, an organizer of functions.

But most important, I am finally at piece with myself. For the past fifteen years, I ^{have} lived in Great Neck, Long Island, a predominantly Jewish community. My friends are a mix of survivors, American born, foreigners, observant and secular Jews.

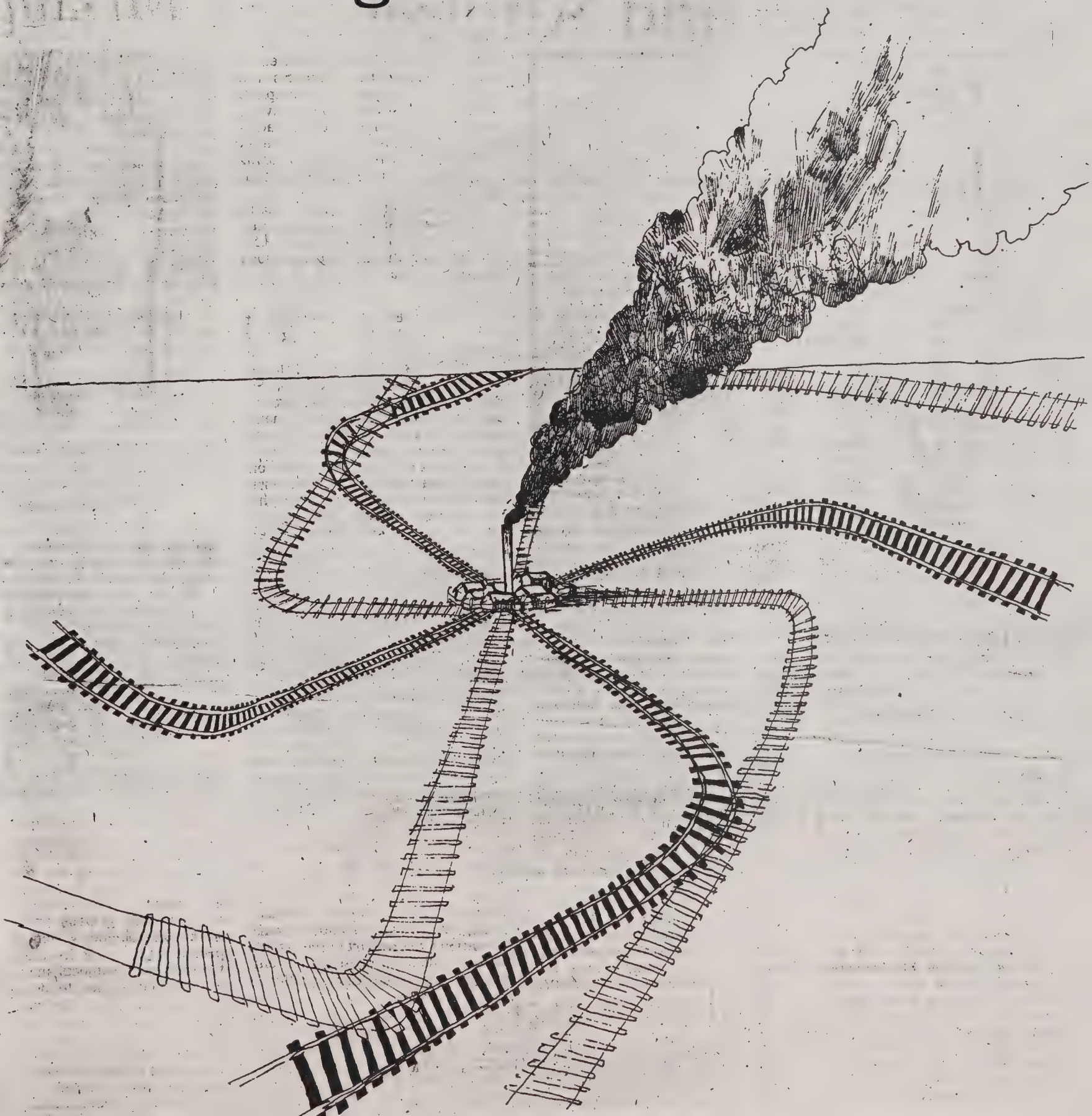
My children are successful professionals, dedicated to Judaism and their Jewish heritage. Their children are named after my parents and uncle Hsieh.

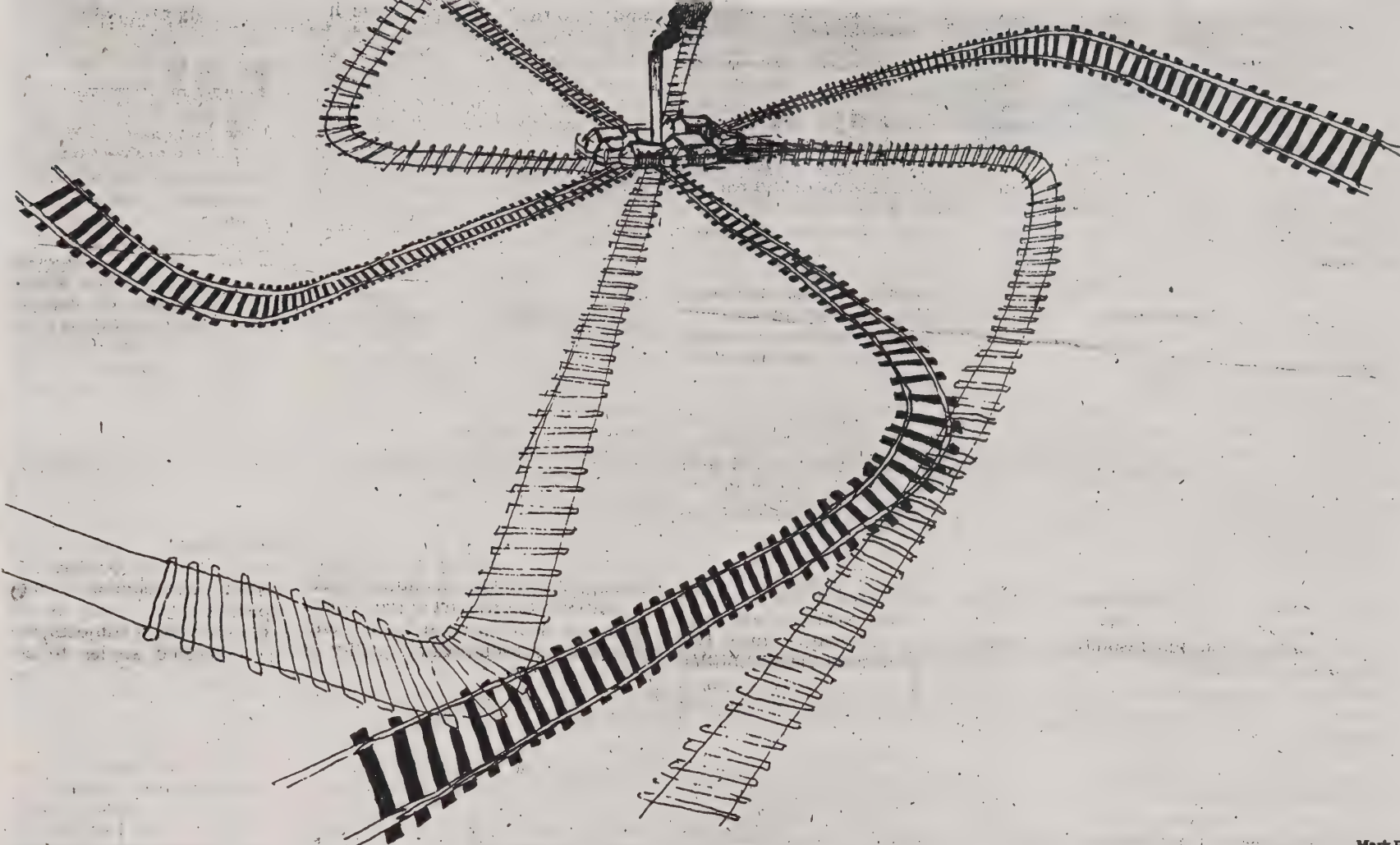
I have written these vignettes and reflections for the sake of my children, grandchildren and their offsprings.

And as I have strived to preserve the history, mores and traditions of my ancestors, so I hope will my descendants.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 1983

The Obligations of a Survivor





Mark Podwal

By JUDITH TRAUB

O I have the right to call myself a survivor?

The question has arisen often in my thoughts during the past years, yet I had no answer until recently.

When World War II broke out, I was 3 years old, in Poland and Jewish. My parents, my sister and I spent war years in ghettos, in hiding, among partisans.

I was not transported to Belzec, but Aunt Pearl and my Uncle Mordechai and my paternal grandmother, Chochekopf, were among those killed there. I was not incarcerated at Majdanek, but my maternal grandparents Reisel and Eli Cwilich were burned in its crematorium. I

was not in the Warsaw ghetto, but my Uncle Chaim was shot on its streets.

I was not an inmate at Auschwitz, but my Uncle Kisiel was liberated there. He was the only other family member besides my parents, my sister and myself to live through the Holocaust, yet he was not a "survivor." He was crushed in spirit and mind, and he died a broken man a few years later in Israel.

And the rest of my numerous relatives? They were all murdered by the Nazis in the early 1940's — perhaps at the Rotunda in Zamosc, my hometown, or in the town square of Lublin, or gunned down against a village wall, or on an open road. . . .

About 40 years later I returned to Poland. My arrival coincided with the eve of Tisha b'Ab, a fast day commemorating the destruction of the first and second temples in Jerusalem, but to me more significantly the destruction of European Jews.

As I stood on the blood-soaked

grounds of concentration and extermination camps at Belzec, Majdanek, Oswiecim-Brzezinka (Auschwitz-Birkenau), Sobibor and the ghettos of Warsaw, Cracow, Zamosc, Lublin, I saw crematoria, metal and stone monuments, gas chambers, flowers, bales of braids, wreaths, hundreds of thousands of pairs of shoes, memorial candles, piles of eyeglasses, plaques, mounds of toothbrushes and shaving brushes, charts, tons of ashes, inscriptions, warehouses filled with men's, women's and children's clothing, statistics, partial skeletons and bones, photographs, cloth made of human hair. . . .

My hand reached out and touched the shredded blankets on the wooden bunk beds. It stroked the torn sleeves of prison garb now neatly hung row upon row. It fondled the crumpled caps and traced the outline of the Jewish stars. I made contact with the past. The vision of the millions of victims passed before my eyes.

I did not recognize their agonized faces; their terror-filled screams were strange. Yet they were all familiar to me. They were my grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, because they were all my people. I cried and I said Kaddish, the prayer for the dead.

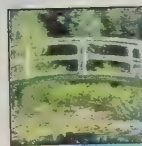
The ghosts and apparitions no longer roam the labyrinth of my mind, for now the dead are real. Their tombstones are erected in my soul, and their graves are dug in the cemetery of my memory.

Yes, I can finally call myself a survivor. And as a survivor it is my obligation to preserve the dignity of these dead. I call out in dismay against my neighbors on Long Island who were members of the Nazi terror but continue to live unpunished. I cringe with the new knowledge that my country's government aided a Hitlerite criminal to escape from justice.

As long as these injustices continue, the martyred victims cannot rest undisturbed.

Judith Traub is a school librarian in Suffolk County.

Suffolk



Father and His Family

(Abraham) Usher Hechtkopf

b. Nov. 25, 1903 in Lanosć, Poland

parents: mother - Sarah Miller

father - Shmuel (Badzin Chasid)
Hechtkopf

siblings: ① Dora - married, 2 children,

lived in Chodorow, Ukraine

② (Usher - married, 2 children)

③ Gittel - married, 3 children; lived in

Bokatin, and cared ^{for} bedridden mother (Sarah)
in her home.

④ Moishe - engaged

⑤ Hirsch - single

⑥ Pearl - married ^{with} an infant. Lived
in Chodorow, Ukraine and was a teacher

⑦ Shmuel - (a cousin) - single, an attorney.

Lived with Dora.

Grandfather: Shmuel, died in 1934 of
cancer of the liver. The rest were
all murdered by the Nazis.

Apr. 19, 1984 - Usher passed away in NYC.

Mother and Her Family

Rywka Zwillich

b. Dec. 25, 1905 in Lamosi, Poland

parents: mother - Raizel Helfman

father - Eli (The Levite) Zwillich

Siblings: ① Mordechai - married, no children

② Kisil (Ikutiel) - single, in cement business

③ (Rywka) - married to Usher Hechtkopf

④ Edzia (an orphaned ^{adopted} cousin) - single

⑤ Chaim - single, in cement business

⑥ Blima - single ⑦ Balcia (a ^{adopted} cousin) - single

All lived in Lamosi. Edzia died in 1935 of tuberculosis. The rest were all murdered by the Nazis except for Kisil. He survived in Majdanek, Skoszyko, and Auschwitz.

Oct., 1963 - Kisil Zwillich passed away in Israel

Aug. 16, 1995 - Rywka passed away in N.Y.C.

Chronology of Events in the Hechtkopf Family History

- Feb. 18, 1927 - Ryńska Twillick and
Uszer Hechtkopf married in Ławosć.
- Aug. 14, 1928 - Tosia (sister) - born in Ławosć.
- Sept., 1936 - Flour mill "Stawa" built
in Tomaszów Kubelski by Uszer and partners.
- Apr. 20, 1936 - Ita (Irena) - born in Ławosć.
- Sept. 1937 - Uszer and family moved to
Tomaszów.
- Sept. 1, 1939 - Hitler invaded Poland.
- Sept. 24, 1939 - Uszer and family flee
from the Germans and arrive in
Bawa Ruska. Continue to Chodorow
which is occupied by the Russians.
- June 29, 1940 - Exiled from Chodorow
by the Russians and sent to Siberia
as "enemies of the people."
- July and August, 1940 - on the way to
Siberia by cattle car train, boats,
wagons, rafts.
- Sept. 5, 1940 - Arrive in Bodaybo,
Siberia. Uszer hospitalized,
rest of family housed in barracks.

Oct. 5, 1940 - Apr. 15, 1942

Tanarak and Siniuga, Siberia

June 1941 - Germany broke the Non-

Aggression Pact and attacked Russia

April 15, 1942 - Usser received a promotion and was sent by freight plane (with family) to Kirensk.

Oct. 1942 - Political prisoners from Poland declared free citizens by Stalin, and received Russian passports.

Sept. 10, 1943 - Usser and family arrived in Tashkent, Uzbek Republic, and a few weeks later moved to Samarkand.

March 2, 1946 - left Samarkand; traveled on illegal rail tickets via Lamsic to Lemberg

Mar. 10, 1946 - Lodz, Poland

May. 15, 1946 - Szczecin, Poland, 2 weeks later smuggled by "Breicha" into West Berlin

May 28, 1946 - Schlachtensee D.P. camp in West Berlin.

Jan. 15, 1947 - Stuttgart, W. Germany

Aug. 15, 1948 - Munich, W. Germany

Dec. 4, 1951 - Arrived in New York Harbor and continued by train to Chicago.

June, 1953 - Judy graduated from "The Ada Crown Hebrew Academy" High School.

Sept, 1953 - Judy enrolled at the University of Illinois in Chicago (Navy Pier).

Nov. 1953 - Usser and Rynka bought a chicken farm in Vineland, N.J. and moved there.

June 1954 - Judy moved to New York,

Sept. 1954 - Judy enrolled at Brooklyn College and Yeshiva University Teachers' Institute.

Sept. 1956 - Jan. 1957 - Judy studied at "Maakon Chaim Greenberg" in Israel.

June 1956 - Judy graduated from Brooklyn College with BA in Education and from YU Teachers' Institute with BRE in Hebrew Education.

July 1, 1959 - Judy married Dr. Gerald Traub. He was stationed in Pirmasens, Germany as officer (dentist) in the US Army

Sept, 1959 - June 1961 - Judy taught at the American Dependents' school in Pirmasens, Germany.
 Sept. 1961 - Judy and Gerald returned to the US and settled in East Northport, (Long Island) N.Y.

June 17, 1962 - Shari Rynn was born (daughter)

June, 1963 - Judy graduated from Hebrew Theological Seminary with MHL degree (Masters in Hebrew Letters).

May 3, 1964 - Jeffrey Scott was born (son).

Sept, 1967 - Uszer and Rynka moved from Vineland, N.J. to Manhattan, N.Y.

Sept. 1968 - Judy and Gerald moved to Greenvale, (L.I.), N.Y.

June, 1972 - Judy graduated from Long Island University with MLS (Masters in Library Science) degree.

June 1973 - June 1995 - Judy worked as elementary school librarian in Central Islip Public Schools.

Dec. 1986 - Judy and Gerald moved to Great Neck, (L.I.) N.Y.

June 1995 - Judy entered retirement and began volunteer work as a docent at the Nassau County Museum of Fine Art, in Roslyn, N.Y.

Jeffrey is married to Marla Rawson. He is a podiatrist and lives in West Hempstead, N.Y. He has 3 children, Leo, 7 (named after Usher), Jake, 5 (named after Uncle Kiseil) and Rhonda, 2 (named after Rynka). Shari will be married in May, 2001 to Todd Brody. She lives in New York City and works as a physical therapist.

